



The garden clubs of Duxbury and Angers, France enjoyed visits to a number of locations, including Newport, Sandwich and Martha's Vineyard.

Garden Club Welcomes French Visitors

By KELLY CLARK

On June 17, members of the Duxbury Garden Club extended their hands and their green thumbs to welcome visiting guests from their sister club in Angers, France.

Since 2001, the Duxbury Free Library has been affiliated with the English-speaking library in Angers under the direction of M'hoec Marshall-Raimbeau. After the seed for a sister garden club was planted, plans began for an exchange program that would connect the two groups and in June 2005, Duxbury Garden Club members flew to France.

Duxbury Garden Club member Lois Jenner said, "The only thing that occurred to me was an exchange program as a possibility in the future." She said in a matter of months, Garden Club members were getting on a plane on their way to Angers.

A year later, members from Angers made their way to Massachusetts where they were met with a busy itinerary. Included on the list of destinations were the secret gardens in Newport, the Heritage Plantation in Sandwich, a tour of Historic Duxbury and the King Caesar House and the Edgartown gardens in Martha's Vineyard.

Angers Garden Club member Jeanie Maisonnave said she enjoyed the varied schedule that the Duxbury Garden Club created for its French guests. "It's not just a question of visiting a place," she said. "It's also a question of meeting people and making friends."

Maryvonne Martin, another member of the garden club in Angers, also enjoyed the sites, especially those in Newport. She said the Vanderbilt mansion "looks like one of our castles in France."

Maisonnave explained her first experiences with gardening when she was living on a Dutch barge off of the Seine. She started planting a few pots and planters on the deck and as she said, "That's how I started gardening 20 years ago."

Martin, in addition to cultivating a garden made up of mostly flowers, teaches a course for refugees at the

English-speaking library in Angers on conversational French. She explained that courses like these are part of a program subsidized by the European community.

The Garden Club is very active in town beautification and their work can be found at the roundabout on Rt. 14, the flag pole on Washington Street, Town Hall, the Town Green, the flag pole at Hall's Corner and the flower arrangements at the library and the John Alden house. Duxbury member Sarah McCormick explained that since the Garden Club projects are all volunteer work, they have to raise a lot of money.

In contrast, Maisonnave said that there isn't as much volunteer work in France toward town beautification because it is subsidized by the government. "We know where our taxes go," she said.

Maisonnave continued to say that there are often decorating competitions between towns and each town receives a "flower rating," ranging from one to three flowers. The flower ratings are much like America's star rating system and signs with each town's flower rating are posted at the entrance of the towns.

"Beauty, design, art and flowers are a priority in France," Duxbury member Mary Jane Noel said.

McCormick said the Duxbury Garden Club has also sponsored such decorating competitions, including a window box competition for commercial businesses.

"Our guests had never been to the US before," Duxbury member Shelley Beeby said. "One [French] gentleman said his whole idea of America had been altered. He could not get over our openness, our friendliness, how hard we work and generally our hospitality."

"An awful lot of understanding happens in a visit like this," Beeby said.

McCormick believes it is the size of the program that has made it so successful. "In a small exchange, you can do something extraordinary," she said. "Small is beautiful."